

the submission by the executive branch of specified information or recommendations to the Congress. The executive branch shall construe such provisions in a manner consistent with the President's constitutional authority to supervise the unitary executive branch, to protect the deliberative processes of the Executive, and to submit to the Congress such recommendations as the President judges necessary and expedient.

George W. Bush

The White House,
December 19, 2002.

NOTE: H.R. 4664, approved December 19, was assigned Public Law No. 107-368.

Statement on Signing Legislation To Reauthorize the Hydrographic Services Improvement Act of 1998 and For Other Purposes

December 19, 2002

Today I have signed into law H.R. 4883, an Act to reauthorize the Hydrographic Services Improvement Act of 1998, and for other purposes.

The executive branch shall construe sections 221(a)(4), 223(b), and 241(a)(2) of the Act as providing statutory bases for revocation of commissions or removal from service that are separate from, in addition to, and not in derogation of the President's constitutional authority to remove officers of the United States. The executive branch also shall construe sections 222 and 224 in a manner consistent with the President's constitutional authority to nominate and appoint candidates who are not the subject of recommendations under those sections.

George W. Bush

The White House,
December 19, 2002.

NOTE: H.R. 4883, approved December 19, was assigned Public Law No. 107-372.

Executive Order 13281—Half-Day Closing of Executive Departments and Agencies of the Federal Government on Tuesday, December 24, 2002

December 19, 2002

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, it is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1. All executive branch departments and agencies of the Federal Government shall be closed and their employees excused from duty for the last half of the scheduled workday on Tuesday, December 24, 2002, the day before Christmas Day, except as provided in section 2 below.

Sec. 2. The heads of executive branch departments and agencies may determine that certain offices and installations of their organizations, or parts thereof, must remain open and that certain employees must report for duty for the full scheduled workday on December 24, 2002, for reasons of national security or defense or other public reasons.

Sec. 3. Tuesday, December 24, 2002, shall be considered as falling within the scope of Executive Order 11582 of February 11, 1971, and of 5 U.S.C. 5546 and 6103(b) and other similar statutes insofar as they relate to the pay and leave of employees of the United States.

George W. Bush

The White House,
December 19, 2002.

[Filed with the Office of the Federal Register, 11:04 a.m., December 20, 2002]

NOTE: This Executive order was published in the *Federal Register* on December 23.

Remarks Following Discussions With the Quartet Principals and an Exchange With Reporters

December 20, 2002

President Bush. The Vice President and I are honored to welcome the Quartet Principals to the Oval Office. I want to thank you all for coming. I appreciate so very much

your working with us to move the Israeli-Palestinian issue forward to a peaceful resolution of what has been a longstanding conflict.

I am strongly committed to the vision that I outlined on June the 24th. I believe it is in everybody's best interests that there be two states living side by side in peace. And this Government will work hard to achieve that. And I want thank you all for joining us in working toward that important vision.

There are some keys to moving forward. All of us must work hard to fight against terror so that a few cannot deny the dreams of the many; that we must encourage the development of Palestinian institutions which are transparent, which promote freedom and democracy; that we must work together to ease the humanitarian situation. There's—too many Palestinian moms and dads grieve over the future for their children because of hunger and poverty, lack of health care.

I appreciate the fact that the Quartet is working on what we call a roadmap. I view the roadmap as a part of the vision that I described. It is a way forward. It sets conditions. It's a results-oriented document. It is a way to bring people together so that they share their responsibilities.

We're assuming our responsibilities. The people in the neighborhood must assume their responsibilities. All nations must be committed to peace in order for us to achieve peace, must be committed to the vision of two states side by side in order to achieve the vision of living side by side.

The roadmap is not complete yet, but the United States is committed to its completion. We are committed to its implementation in the name of peace.

I want to thank you all for coming. We're on our holiday season. It is the season of peace on Earth. We confirmed that today in this meeting.

Kofi.

Secretary-General Annan. Thank you very much, Mr. President. We've had a very good meeting this morning, and we are very close to finalizing the roadmap. And we believe that this is a roadmap that can help bring about the vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side. It will require sacrifices from both sides, and it will

demand parallel steps by both states for us to be able to move forward.

The Quartet has indicated that this roadmap and the approach of the parties has to be performance-driven; they have to perform. But it also has to be hope-driven. And I believe that this vision of two states living in peace and security will be the dream that will keep that hope alive. And all of us, working with our friends in the region, will work hard to ensure that we achieve this day within the 3-year period that we have set ourselves.

And Mr. President, we want to thank you for your support. And I think working together we can all be able to achieve this objective. Our intention is to release the roadmap and give it to the parties as soon as possible. And I think the communique we'll be putting out will say clearly what we intend to do next. So I will pause here. Thank you very much.

President Bush. Mr. Prime Minister, welcome. Good to see you, sir.

Q. Mr. President—

President Bush. Hold on a second, please. Some of our guests will be speaking.

Foreign Minister Moller. Thank you very much, Mr. President. I'm very glad that you're so dedicated to the peace process in the Middle East. Your vision of the two states is very important. It's very important for European Union that the people in the area know they will get two states which have to live quietly, peacefully, side by side.

What we are trying to do is to pave the way to the two states. And that's why we have endorsed this roadmap and worked with this roadmap, because it's good thing with a vision, but you must know how to go there. And that is what we have in working it. And it has been a very good cooperation—the United States, Russia, the United Nations, and the European Union.

And I think it's very important that Israel knows it will live there forever in security. But they can only have that security if they give a political solution to the Palestinians, that the Palestinians know that their day will come where they get the state, which make them sure of their future. They both have a future, and we have to help them with a future.

Thank you, Mr. President.

President Bush. Igor. In *Ingles?* [*Laughter*]

Foreign Minister Ivanov. Thank you for receiving us, first thing.

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

Foreign Minister Ivanov. The second thing, before we had a lot of interest, good documents, but we couldn't implement. Now we have good document, and the most important thing is to implement. This is our main objective now. Thank you.

President Bush. Thank you, sir. Very good.

Sandra [Sandra Sobieraj, Associated Press], quick question.

Iraq

Q. Mr. President, your administration concluded yesterday that Saddam Hussein pretty much blew his last chance to come clean on his weapons of mass destruction. Are we now on a path to war?

President Bush. One thing is for certain. We will fulfill the terms and conditions of 1441.

The world spoke clearly that we expect Mr. Saddam Hussein to disarm. Yesterday's document was not encouraging. We expected him to show that he would disarm. And as the Secretary of State said, it's—it's a long way from there. And we're serious about keeping the peace. We're serious about working with our friends in the United Nations so that this body, ably led by Kofi Annan, has got relevance as we go into the 21st century. And yesterday was a disappointing day for those who have longed for peace.

Listen, I want to thank you all for coming.

Q. Trent Lott question?

President Bush. I would have, but we ran out of time. [*Laughter*] We ran out of time. They eat up your time. We had only so much time available. They ate up your time. I'm sorry. [*Laughter*]

Q. You can drop by later.

President Bush. We could do that; you're right. But we're due at Christmas parties.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:31 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. Participating in the meeting were Secretary-General Kofi Annan of the United Nations, Minister for Foreign Affairs Per Stig Moller of Denmark, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Sergeyevich Ivanov of Russia.

In his remarks, the President referred to President Saddam Hussein of Iraq. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the tape was incomplete.

Statement on Senator Trent Lott's Decision Not To Seek the Senate Majority Leader's Position

December 20, 2002

I respect the very difficult decision Trent made on behalf of the American people. As Majority and Minority Leader of the Senate, Trent Lott improved education for the American people; he led the way in securing tax relief; he strengthened our national security; and he stood for a bold and effective foreign policy. Trent is a valued friend, and a man I respect. I am pleased he will continue to serve our Nation in the Senate, and I look forward to working with him on our agenda to make America safer, stronger, and better.

Message on the Observance of Christmas 2002

December 20, 2002

I send greetings to those celebrating Christmas.

During Christmas, we gather with family and friends to celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. As God's only Son, Jesus came to Earth and gave His life so that we may live. His actions and His words remind us that service to others is central to our lives and that sacrifice and unconditional love must guide us and inspire us to lead lives of compassion, mercy, and justice.

The true spirit of Christmas reflects a dedication to helping those in need, to giving hope to those in despair, and to spreading peace and understanding throughout the Earth. As we share love and enjoy the traditions of this holiday, we are also grateful for the men and women of our Armed Forces who are working to defend freedom, secure our homeland, and advance peace and safety around the world.

This Christmas, may we give thanks for the blessings God has granted to our Nation and